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ABSTRACT

This document is a chapter in "The Principles and Practice of Educational Management," which aims to provide a systematic and analytical introduction to the study of educational management. The structure of the book reflects the main substantive areas of educational leadership and management, and most of the major themes are covered in the volume's 19 chapters, of which this is one. This chapter examines two types of extra-institutional partnerships. The first type is partnerships between educational institutions and their communities, especially parents. The second is educational partnerships based on links between educational institutions and the private sector. In the first type, the development of partnerships between schools and parents as individual family units representing their child or children represents a complex and sometimes controversial aspect of state intervention in education. Since parents focus on what is best for their own children and teachers concentrate on school performance as a whole, conflicts are inevitable. But if parents are perceived as productive partners and held responsible for the school's performance, the partnership can be seen as one of shared risk. The progress of all students becomes the parents' responsibility. Partnerships with the private sector focus more on supporting the management of schools and colleges. These partnerships involve the establishment of formal or informal cooperative relationships between educational agencies and profit-making and non-profit-making organizations of interested parties. These partnerships involve the implementation, but rarely the formulation, of policy. Both types of partnerships are broad in scope and detailed in application. Many of them are more or less located within the framework of market forces operating within education. (Contains 42 references.) (RJM)

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New Partnerships for Improvement.

Les Bell

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New Partnerships for Improvement

Les Bell

Introduction

Partnerships between public and private sector institutions are becoming an increasingly important element of government policy throughout the world (Linder and Rosenau, 2000). This is as true of education policy as it is of other policy spheres (Lissaur and Robinson, 2000). In education, however, the growth of public–private partnerships is often linked to an emphasis on school improvement. Such partnerships are frequently intended to support a series of strategies to enhance the academic performance of children and can be found embodied in many policy statements on education in a large number of countries. Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) argue that there is now a widespread assumption internationally that schools affect children's development, that there are observable regularities in schools and colleges that add value and that the task of educational policies is to improve all schools. They argue that school improvement research seeks to identify how schools and colleges can improve by changing, developing and establishing new forms of educational partnerships with stakeholders both within and outside the accepted boundaries of the school or college. Hopkins notes that school improvement is:

> an approach to educational change that is concerned with process as well as outcomes. School improvement is about raising student achievement through enhancing the teaching–learning process and the conditions that support it. It is about strategies for improving the school's capacity for providing quality education. (Hopkins, 1994: 75)

Sammons et al. (1994) point out that the development of good home–school relations and establishing mechanisms for parental involvement will facilitate school improvement while Davies (1997), in reviewing the school improvement literature relating to schools in both the First and Third Worlds, adds good external relations to aid financial and moral support for the school to

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her list of such factors. Beare et al. (1989) argue that the parent body of any school has a rich fund of skill and expertise, knowledge and experience that goes beyond the capacities of teachers, and such a resource should be harnessed to support school improvement. Similarly, Stoll and Mortimore (1997) recognise that approaches emanating from business and industry can make an equally valuable contribution. They recognise the value of partnerships that involve parents, community representatives and agencies, local education authorities, business, industry, higher education, government agencies and educational consultants, among others in the school improvement process.

Partnerships within an educational context can take place in a number of different ways and at different organisational levels. Hall (1999) identifies five levels of partnership:

- intrapersonal where individuals vary in their preferences for collaboration
- interpersonal based on forms of relationships between colleagues within institutions
- intra-institutional that focuses on the management of the sections of the school or college
- inter-institutional partnerships between autonomous schools or colleges
- extra-institutional that requires alliances to be formed with public, private or informal groups outside the institution.

In this chapter, two different types of extra-institutional partnerships will be examined. The first is partnerships between educational institutions and their communities, especially parents, and the second is educational partnerships based on links between educational institutions and organisations from the private sector. These partnerships have significantly different characteristics. What they have in common, however, is that their espoused purposes are usually related to the improvement of the educational experience of pupils and students in the schools and colleges to which the partnership agreements relate. They purport to be, as Lareau (1996) points out, a relationship between equals where power and control are evenly distributed.

Partnerships with parents

The development of partnerships between schools and parents as individual family units representing their child or children at a particular school represents a complex and sometimes controversial aspect of state intervention in education. In 1994 a survey of teachers and school principals in Hong Kong conducted by the Education Department indicated a positive belief in the desirability of having effective home–school co-operation. There was far less agreement about the nature of that partnership or about empowering parents. The Hong Kong School Management Initiative, introduced in 1991,

encouraged schools to adopt new management practices in order to improve the quality of school education (Cheng, 1999a). These changes included providing greater opportunities for parents to become involved in the planning and management of work in schools and in evaluating that work. On the basis of his research in Hong Kong, Ng (1999) identified a six-level model of involvement in home–school partnerships that is divided into two categories. The lower levels of the partnership are largely focused outside the school and consist, first, of merely communicating with the school; second, providing support for children's learning at home and third, taking part in organised parental activities such as parent–teacher associations. Involvement within the school moves from providing help in classrooms, libraries and with extra-curricular activities, through helping to influence the decision-making process by representing views of parental groups or being part of the consultative process, to the highest level of involvement, full participation in school governance. He noted that the intention of the policy change was for parents to play a much more proactive role in supporting learning and in facilitating the attainment of a much higher level of academic performance by their children. Ng concluded that: 'Both teachers and parents wanted to increase contact at levels one and two . . . Both parties were very keen on improving and increasing communication at the lower levels of the model' (Ng, 1999: 553–6).

Agreement about the nature of partnership was, however, limited to the first two levels of Ng's model. He noted that while parents liked to take part in some school activities in which their children are involved, teachers did not like to be involved in working with parents. He also concluded that most parents were not keen on becoming members of the school management committee but where this was not the case, their involvement was unwelcome. Only a few schools in Hong Kong permitted parents to become partners in the process of determining school policies (Ng, 1999). Nevertheless, the Hong Kong government remains committed to the promotion and strengthening of this form of partnership and links initiatives to involve parents and teachers jointly in school management closely to the improvement of pupil performance and the development of high quality school education (Education Commission, 1997).

The importance of parents in the education of children has long been recognised and, in England, can be traced back to the Plowden Report (DES, 1967) which argued for parent–teacher associations to be established. The extent to which these were partnerships is questionable (Bell, 1999). By the mid-1980s, the nature of parent–school partnerships had been irrevocably changed. The 1986 Education Act (DES, 1986) increased parental representation on governing bodies and required the governing body of each school to deliver an annual report for parents and to hold an annual meeting of parents to discuss that report. Although it is a path being followed elsewhere, the education system in England may have moved further than in many other countries to

mobilise parental support for school improvement. This type of partnership has now been formulated into a formal agreement. All schools are required by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to prepare a written home–school agreement and associated parental declaration (DfEE, 1998). These agreements must contain a statement of the school's aims and values, a definition of the responsibilities of both the parents and the school together with a statement of the school's expectations of its pupils. Governing bodies must consult parents before changing any part of this agreement. Once the agreement was finalised, schools 'invited' parents to sign it. This all had to be in place as soon after September 1999 as practicable – a year after the guidance to schools was published (Hood, 1999). The rationale for this development is that parents are the first and most enduring teachers of children and they play a crucial role in helping their children to learn. It is based on the belief that children are more successful when schools and parents work together and this can happen most effectively if parents know what the school is trying to achieve. The issue now is whether such a partnership based on a legalistic agreement is the best way of establishing an appropriate form of home–school relationship. Even if this is the way forward, how can such an agreement be enforced? The development of this form of partnership marks a change in emphasis in the role of parents from that of passive consumer through that of consumer exercising choice within the educational marketplace to that of participant, willing or coerced, in the educational enterprise itself. It is clear that one of the significant factors driving this particular approach to partnership is the extent to which schools strive to improve pupil performance.

Ng (1999) suggests that in many countries parents are no longer regarded by teachers as troublemakers or ill informed. Parent–school relationships in Hong Kong are similar to those in many other countries. These partnerships, he argues, are typified by collaboration but collaboration of a limited kind. He points out that parents can play a complementary role in educating children through their personal, social and academic development. Parents can provide volunteer help for schools and even be elected to governing bodies, thereby playing a direct part in school governance. It should be noted, however, that much of the literature on this form of partnership acknowledges that the relationships on which they are based are characterised by an imbalance of power in favour of the teachers (Vincent, 1996). Perhaps the solution to this problem lies in accelerating the process of empowerment of the weaker partner to ensure that the development of the partnership is not carried out through a process of teacher domination and on the basis of the teachers' agendas (Ng, 1999). Increasingly, however, these agendas are driven, not by parental interests, but by a focus on pupil achievement.

The impetus for such new partnerships in education is often linked to the development of strategies for school improvement by harnessing the new

partners to improvement strategies linked to enhancing pupil performance (Ng, 1999). The most radical forms of parental partnership in education can be found in charter schools in the USA. Here parents are able to found or co-found schools which are governed by boards of directors composed primarily of parents (Yancey, 2000). More typically, however parental involvement in education is heavily bounded by the visions and desires of professional educators who largely determine what parental participation in schools should be (Yancey, 2000).

Parents may provide additional practical or supervisory support for teachers by working more closely with their children as part of the educative process. More frequently, however, these partnerships are related to an ideological position based on the introduction of market forces into education and the concomitant decentralisation of decision-making (Crozier, 1998; Linder and Rosenau, 2000). As McNamara et al. note:

> the ideological move to construct education as a market place holds both systemic and economic implications for schools, teachers, children and parents and may involve policies . . . based on 'educational' values being marginalized in favour of those lodged in market imperatives. Significant amongst them is the necessity for schools to promote a positive image of themselves in terms of performance indicators of product/output. (McNamara et al., 2000: 475)

Within this context contradictions are inevitable. For example, many parents focus on what is best for their own children. What matters is what their children are doing as individuals. Teachers, on the other hand, are more concerned with aggregate notions of school performance and improvement, and attempt to involve parents in the quest to achieve improved aggregate goals (McNamara et al., 2000).

Thus, the focus on school improvement and an emphasis on competition between schools fragments provision whereas partnership fosters commitment and collective responsibility. In the context of the educational market and the partnerships that it generates, this commitment and responsibility is based on that individual self-interest which is necessary to ensure that cost is minimised and benefit is maximised from the product available. This interaction between partnership and benefit is often expressed at a societal rather than an individual level. In many parts of the Asia-Pacific region the close connection between education and economic development is widely recognised and a significant number of improvement initiatives have been introduced to strengthen the contribution of education to economic growth. In Malaysia the entire education system is being reviewed in order to meet the workforce requirements of the knowledge-based economy and a system of lifelong learning is being promoted to ensure that workers can continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge (Third Outline Perspective, 2001). School–parent part-

nerships, therefore, are grounded in relatively high-level benefits, benefits that may accrue at a societal, regional, local community or even school level. Most parents, however, are concerned about the benefits that pertain to their own children as individuals within the education process. Such different perceptions of the benefits from these partnerships can lead to tensions within them. Nevertheless, policies that locate educational benefits largely at the highest levels can be identified in a significant number of countries:

> In Korea, the Presidential Council . . . announced the 'Education Reform Plan' . . . to improve their education system and to address the new challenges . . . In Singapore, significant education reforms were introduced after the Report of the Economic Committee . . . demanded substantial educational expansion and improvement to meet the needs of Singapore's economic development in a very competitive environment . . . The recent educational developments in South East Asia provide strong evidence to support the . . . assertion that educational reform is the major means of supporting the economic, political and cultural development of a society. (Cheng, 1999b: 3–5)

The recognition of the close links between education and the economy is not restricted to Asia. In Australia, students' mathematical capability must be improved to enable the economy to grow and be competitive (Kemp, 2000). The tertiary and higher education system in New Zealand must contribute to economic development by providing more graduates for science-based occupations (Gould, 2001). In Germany the emphasis is also on the link between the knowledge-based economy and the central importance of education to economic development (Bulmahn, 2000). In England it has been argued that: 'Our future prosperity as a nation depends on how well our schools, in partnership with parents, prepare young people for work' (Department for Education, 1994: 25). This new orthodoxy focuses on improving national economies by tightening the connection between schooling, employment and productivity and by enhancing student outcomes, employment-related skills and competences (Carter and O'Niel, 1995). The implication of this is that both students and parents are partners in the educational enterprise. As a result, parents who were once regarded at best as passive supporters have changed into active participants. They have now been further repositioned as informed consumers in the educational marketplace.

Thus, the nature of this partnership has now shifted from parents as passive or active consumers to one in which the total mobilisation of resources in support of the educative process has sought to transform parents into productive partners and places a responsibility on all stakeholders, including parents, for the success or failure of the educational enterprise. Such partnerships involve the sharing of both responsibility and risk. The responsibility for the attainment of pupils in any school, both collectively and as individuals, has now been broadened to include parents. This, of course, shifts some of the burden

of responsibility away from teachers. Nevertheless, the extent to which schools succeed is determined by measures of pupil performance, and it is against these that school–parent partnerships will be evaluated.

In some partnerships the principle of subsidiarity posits a hierarchical relationship between partners. This is the case in education. The parents are not equal partners in determining desirable outcomes, the nature of the tests for those outcomes, or the levels that determine success. These remain located either within the sphere of the professional educators or of politicians. What is required is that parents take on a mediating role to the extent that they play a significant part in helping to implement the academic policy of the school by controlling and influencing their children. It is possible, however, that a dependency relationship may develop in which teachers are unable effectively to fulfil their functions without parental support. This will happen if substitution is either implied or takes place. Substitution is where one partner replaces all or part of the function of another such that parents take on the role of teachers.

It has been argued that home-school partnerships are really a control or accountability mechanism in another guise. As Crozier puts it:

> Partnership then, within the educational context, becomes something more than . . . support for schools. It is argued here that partnership as a part of this process of accountability is a device for surveillance. However, this surveillance is not one way: as well as the accountability of teachers through surveillance, school relationships have been underpinned . . . by some form of surveillance and social control of pupils . . . and parents. (Crozier, 1998: 126)

Such partnerships may challenge teachers' professionalism and mark a further erosion of teacher autonomy. At the same time, in order to achieve a partnership in which the school's aims are realised, teachers need to persuade parents to adopt the school's definition of what it means to be a 'good' parent and a 'good' pupil. This can often mean the imposition of an entire value system on parents for, as Crozier (1998) notes, the development of partnership is carried out through a process of teacher domination and on the basis of the teachers' agenda. Thus, while parents and external educational agencies may monitor the work of teachers, teachers are using home–school partnerships to monitor parents who monitor pupils.

It can be seen, therefore, that the fundamental question raised about the nature of such partnerships is the one identified by Kagiso (2000). As part of his artistic and architectural work in South African townships he recognised that collaborative partnerships can provide a structural framework within which participants can take responsibility for the shape and internal working of the partnership and its relationship with the outside world. Within such partnerships the participants are free to establish both the structure of the

partnership and the nature of the relationships within it. Often, such partnerships with parents throughout Africa are focused on obtaining resources for schools. More often, however, partnerships intended to implement aspects of social policy tend to be arranged in such a way that all aspects of the relevant relationships are predetermined and controlled. This raises questions about the nature and purpose of any particular partnership. Who benefits from it, what new forms of organisational and management relationships are established to implement such partnerships and by whom? These questions are particularly pertinent in the case of school–parent partnerships.

Partnerships with the private sector

In many countries the alliance between education and commercial organisations is based on the need to find non-governmental resources to support either the basic provision of education or its improvement. In China, for example, local officials and school administrators are forced by circumstance to engage with groups outside the education system in fund-raising endeavours to support the provision of some schooling (Lo, 1999). The concern here is to absorb the impact of the market economy in such a way as to be able to raise adequate funds to keep teachers in schools and colleges, and to maintain facilities. This is partly achieved through linking business closely to schools through the establishment of school factories which provided important supplementary income for many schools. As Bush et al. point out: 'School-run businesses are a particular feature of Chinese education and relate in part to the emphatic view that education and work must be closely linked if China is to sustain its economic growth' (Bush et al., 1998: 139). Indeed, Coleman (1999) argues that the relationship between education and industry in China has become almost symbiotic. Schools and colleges have developed entrepreneurial activities including factories and farms as well as service industries to such an extent that virtually every type of school has embraced the idea of school-run enterprises as a source of additional funding. This is an example of a collaborative partnership where the symbiotic relationship between the partners benefits both of them.

In Malaysia the links between education and commercial agencies take a somewhat different form. Here the government: 'is keen that the private sector plays an active part in supplementing the provision of higher education, especially in technical and vocational education, which can be very costly' (Lee, 1999: 95). This has resulted in a significant element of tertiary and higher educational provision in that country being provided either by the private sector acting independently, rather than in partnership with the public sector, or by entrepreneurial institutions from abroad. Here, partnership is based on the collaboration between private sector providers of education and government agencies who benefit from that provision as well as seeking to

regulate it. This results in a complex set of relationships that revolve around the extent to which the government acts as the client and the private sector organisation as the provider and how far this can be compatible with governmental regulation of privately provided education and its concomitant demands for compliance from the private sector. The constraints on each partner stem from the nature of the relationship between state and private organisations when they seek to coexist as both providers and consumers.

It has been argued (Linder and Rosenau, 2000) that more formalised partnerships based on an alliance between educational institutions and organisations in the private sector will enable all parties to escape from the constraints of the public–private dualism that can be found in many areas of social policy in most countries. That may be why many countries throughout the world are now experimenting with extra-institutional public–private partnerships in education (Linder and Rosenau, 2000). Such partnerships are based on establishing formal or informal co-operative relationships between educational agencies at national, regional or institutional levels on the one hand, and profit-making and non-profit-making organisations or specific groups of interested parties such as parents, on the other. These new forms of partnership are intended to facilitate or support the management of schools and colleges. Partnership in this context refers to the formation of co-operative relationships, the purposes of which include the implementation, but rarely the formulation, of policy or the provision of additional support for existing policies through empowering one or more of the partners to play a more active role or take more responsibility. These partnerships are a new departure in many countries and mark a change to the situation in which governments have defended their spheres of influence from incursion by private sector organisations. Governments are now more willing to shift at least some of the responsibility for educational provision into the private sector in order to keep public spending under control and to avoid tax increases. The rationale for this, of course, is that partnerships with the private sector reduce costs although the evidence for this is, at best, mixed and at worst contradictory (Linder and Rosenau, 2000).

A significant example of state sponsored extra-institutional partnership in education is the development of Educational Action Zones (EAZs) in England. While these are not found elsewhere in the world in this form, they do illustrate some significant general issues in relation to the role of business and commercial partners within education, as can be seen below. Educational Action Zones have evolved from the Educational Priority Areas of the 1960s which focused on improving pupil performance in basic subjects in deprived areas. They encapsulate the requirement for the state to shift at least some of the burden of financing education to the private sector, the opening up of education to influence from the private sector and the deployment of resources to facilitate school improvement. The EAZs provide opportunities for action

where schools and/or LEAs are not proving to be sufficiently effective in raising standards in both urban and rural areas of deprivation. Educational Action Zones normally cover two or three secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. They are led by a Forum which provides an action plan as part of the bid for the EAZ. This plan might include an application to the government to modify the National Curriculum or to operate outside the national pay and conditions arrangements for teachers. Money is allocated by a competitive bidding process based on submissions which include a clear statement of the level of disadvantage being addressed and the roles that will be played by LEAs, schools and other partners from industry and commerce in establishing ways to raise standards. Educational Action Zones depend for their success on partnerships with industry and commerce. They are firmly located within an educational policy framework derived from the school effectiveness movement and are intended to have a far-reaching impact on the work of teachers in schools and classrooms (Bell, 1999).

This conceptualisation of partnership was intended to create a set of relationships based on the involvement of community, industrial and business groups that would move the educational agencies more rapidly towards the achievement of general educational policy objectives and to the attainment of specific levels of pupil performance in tests and examinations. In some cases, LEAs retained a leading role in the EAZ partnerships, but in others substitution of LEA functions and responsibilities by private sector partners has taken place (Lissaur and Robinson, 2001). At the same time, all EAZ partnerships were intended to bring in additional resources through private sector sponsorship. Yet few EAZs have been successful in achieving the desired level of private sector contributions, i.e. £250,000. It may be that this lack of private funding is a product of the location of the EAZs in areas of disadvantage. The level of private sector funding for EAZs reflects that for other initiatives, city technology colleges, for example. It is more likely, therefore, that the private sector, while it may be willing to take some of the responsibility for achieving policy objectives, is not prepared to accept extensive financial commitments. The benefits that may accrue to private sector organisations who become involved in such partnerships are, at best, indirect and limited and, at worst, non-existent. It is clear, on the evidence of EAZs, therefore, that the type of partnerships that the private sector is willing to accept are limited and specific. The nature of partnerships, in these cases, is largely determined by the perceptions of the major partner, the business partner, rather than the policy aspirations of government.

Conclusion

Partnerships in education now seek to impact on activities in the classroom that influence pupil performance as much as on the school and the regional

administrative structure. They are both broad in scope and detailed in application. They are increasingly concerned with helping schools to achieve specific and measurable performance targets. This phase of educational policy-making, therefore, appears to be strongly post-Fordian (Bottery, 1998). Policy-making and implementation is becoming increasingly centralised. Specific criteria for success are determined by central policy-makers while a variety of providers are encouraged to identify new ways of meeting those criteria. The agenda focuses on raising standards but the standards to be attained are determined centrally. In the UK the responsibility for achieving those standards is clearly defined. In schools it rests with the headteacher, but schools must receive specific support from LEAs. Equity is now defined in terms of meeting those standards while social justice is expressed in terms of fostering civic virtues such as employability and productiveness. Those that are believed to be failing will lose their autonomy. In Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand schools are now required to employ similar new forms of partnerships with parents in order to ensure that their targets are met and their autonomy retained.

Many of the educational partnerships considered in this chapter, in England and New Zealand for example, are more or less located within the framework of an overarching philosophy which has as one of its central tenets the operation of market forces within education as a process for decision-making, choice and resource allocation. Each set of partnership arrangements is tasked, directly or indirectly, with supporting an explicit or implicit school improvement process. The model on which these processes rest contains a number of significant flaws, not least of which is its characterisation of the education enterprise itself as narrow and restrictive both in terms of the nature and scope of the curriculum and the related measures of performance. This is partly because the emphasis in many countries, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore for example, on national economic competitiveness and the links made between educational, social and economic development, produce an excessively utilitarian approach to education that leads to an inappropriate narrowing of educational objectives and processes (Kam and Gopinathan, 1999). Consequently younger children must become proficient in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy while their older siblings need to enhance their skills through an emphasis on information technology, science and mathematics. In tertiary colleges and universities the focus shifts to that of the knowledge-based economy and lifelong learning to respond to the changing demands of the work place (Bassey, 2001). Within this discourse, a concern for values, equity and social justice has diminished. This need not be the case. The social capital approach to education is not the only alternative. In Denmark a Ministry of Education policy statement emphasises the importance of education in shaping the values that will influence the future direction of society (Vestager, 2001) while Bulmahn (2000) argues that those who consider

education from the perspective purely of national economic self-interest are short-sighted and will be unable to develop long-term policies for the future. Indeed, the present global emphasis on developing partnerships within a market or economic development paradigm can be counterproductive. As both Ball (1999) and Bassey (2001) recognise, the overriding emphasis on the role of education in contributing to economic competitiveness derives from a set of pedagogical strategies linked to a narrow conceptualisation of school improvement and effectiveness that ultimately are antithetical to the demands of a high skills economy. Ng (1999) has pointed to the extent to which the narrowing of the focus of education in Singapore, for example, has helped to create an education system that produces students who are excellent at passing examinations but very limited when it comes to creative thinking and the development of enterprise.

At the same time, school improvement as currently conceptualised locates leadership and, therefore, power almost entirely in the hands of educators and especially school principals. This leads to the development of extremely limited forms of parent–teacher collaborations, such as those found in Hong Kong or to those intended to facilitate the implementation of government policy, in England for example. These forms of partnership are based on an under-conceptualising of leadership itself and often fail to recognise the complexity of school organisation and marginalise many important management processes (Chong and Boon, 1997). As Dimmock and Walker (2000) have reported, both the processes of education and the outcomes of that process, are influenced significantly by culture and religion. This failure fully to consider educational partnerships in the wider context, including the economic situation and the nature of power relationships within a country, has allowed researchers and, more especially, politicians to deduce simplistic solutions to complex problems and to seek to develop partnerships within education systems that serve a very narrow purpose. The partnerships that are now emerging to facilitate the achievement of policy objectives in these education systems contain tensions and conflicts that derive from the fundamental assumptions about the nature and purposes of the educative processes in those societies.

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